

Tips for Writing a College Entrance Essay

In regards to college application essays, “colleges want a third dimension. Without the essay, the application profile is flat.”¹

What can a well-written essay show about you?

- How you think; your creativity
- Your priorities
- Your values; your character
- What you’ve learn from specific experiences. If the only cultural difference you learned from a summer in France is that the cars are a lot smaller in France than in the U.S.A., this gives admission counselors the idea of how little you’ve thought about and analyzed your life experiences.²
- That you are human
- An explanation of grades or exceptional circumstances in your background
- That you took the essay seriously; you saw its value, its importance
- Do you take risks; or do you play it safe?
- Who wrote the essay? You, or your mom?
- Your expectations. Will this college suit you? Will you suit this college?
- Your writing abilities—organization, analysis, interpretation, mastery of the written English language.
- Your insights
- Your enthusiasm
- Your personal style
- **Do you stand out in a crowd of applicants?**
- Your goals for the future



Brainstorm—gather ideas about yourself wherever you can:

- Ask yourself questions: What are my strengths? What are my weaknesses? Why do I do the things I do? What is special about me? What kind of person am I? Under what circumstances do I learn? What interests me? What do I care about?
- Look over your journal (if you have one) or photo album
- Ask your family, friends, teachers, and employers how they see you.

Prewrite, draft and edit, edit, edit your essay.

Evaluate your essay by asking the following questions:

- Does your essay have an introduction (thesis), body (supporting elements, proof) and a conclusion?
- Does your essay have a focus? Do you stick to one major point? Identify one underlying theme that weaves its way through your brainstorming list.
- Do you prove your claims with life experiences? Don’t tell me you are a caring person; show me that you are caring by sharing a personal experience (i.e. you spend 7 hours each week at the local nursing home reading to the residents, playing cards with the residents and writing letters for the residents).
- Does your essay enrich the application by filling in any gaps or explaining any unanswered questions?
- Pay attention to your style of writing. Is your essay interesting and memorable or does it lull your reader into a deep sleep?
- Is your essay sincere? Is it you?

¹ McGinty, Sarah Myers, The College Application Essay, College Entrance Examination Board, NY, 2001, p. 12.

² McGinty, p. 13.